

# NOVÝ DOMOV

ROZŠÍŘENÉ VYDÁNÍ



THE NEW HOMELAND

Pravda vítězí!



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**It is hard to believe that our successful Montreal-based world class industrialist, philanthropist, respected astrophysicist, and Engineer, A. Karel Velan, C.Q. and his wife Mrs. Olga Velan will celebrate their 95<sup>th</sup> birthdays**

**and at the same time the celebrate 72 years of their marriage. Mr. Velan's vitality at his age is truly miraculous. He exercises daily and still goes to the office which keeps him young.**

## OUR VELANS CELEBRATE THEIR 95<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAYS

Ladislav Křivánek for The New Homeland

It has been already 65 years since the thirty-year-old couple and their two small children left their homeland after February 1948. After their arrival in Montreal the family expanded but Mr. Velan has also built an engineering empire with offices on three continents. He is known not only for his business success but also for his generosity: with his wife Olga he helped all their life with humanitarian projects not only in Canada but elsewhere in the world and after 1989 their name became known in the Czech Republic as well.



Our birthday couple was born at the end of the First World War in Morava, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: Karel Velan was born on 8.2.1918 in Ostrava

and Mrs. Olga on 28.3.1918 in Brno (on the same day as John Amos Comenius— as she always proudly points out). They both successfully graduated from Masaryk University in Brno in 1939: Mr. Velan studied at the engineering faculty and Mrs. Olga studied philosophy. After graduation Mr. Velan worked in industrial engineering field during the war. He has been an avid athlete all his life, he loves tennis and skiing and it was exactly at a ski competition where he met a good looking blond girl, his future wife Olga whom he married 72 years ago. Their wedding took place on 22.2.1941 in Brno-Zábřovice. They have three sons – Ivan (1945), Peter (1946) and Thomas who was born in Montreal (1952). The couple loves their 12 grand-children and 15 great-grand-children. Mr. Velan proudly and jokingly says that they were four when they came to Montreal and that today they are forty including the partners.

After the war Mr. Velan founded his successful engineering firm manufacturing textile machinery that had customers in several European countries. Even though he was on the Russian side during the war hoping they would drive the Germans out (he even learned Russian language), after February 1948 when the communists “nationalized” factories his support of the Russians waned. That’s why the Velans decided to move their family to Austria. Eventually Mr. Velan and his little son Ivan drove across the bridge over the Danube river into the “western zone” allegedly to visit their customers to show them their superior machines. Using a fake passport, Mrs. Olga and a two-year-old Peter took a train to Linz few days later. They managed to escape at the last minute just before the border was hermetically sealed. After the family happily reunited they moved to Switzerland. They arrived in Montreal with their sons in July 1949. Almost immediately they became involved in the Czechoslovak community.

Karel Velan came to Canada with a dream to engineer, manufacture and market the best products for the valve industry all over the world. He has realized his dream

and today he is the “World Leader” in his industry – truly the world’s number one. He started working on his new invention – steam trap – in his garage. To manufacture a prototype he rented a room from Thomas Bata and tested the product in McGill University boiler room. He got the results patented immediately in several countries. His first product ever was a steam trap and his first customer ever was Westinghouse, a company in need of special valves. At that time, as Mr. Velan reminisces, using a dictionary, he tried to figure out what the company actually wanted and then got down to work. It was also for the first time his valve was used on an American submarine which was supplied by Westinghouse.

Mr. Velan went on a very successful business trip across the United States – he offered his prototype to American Navy that tested it for a year – and then the orders started to pour in – US Navy installed the steam traps on hundreds of ships and submarines. Within the first six months he had so many orders that he was unable to fulfill them because he did not have a plant. He had to subcontract the production.

Mr. Velan founded the Velan Engineering Ltd. (now Velan Inc.) in 1950 with a \$300,000 loan and became the largest manufacturer of specialty valves in the world. His company listed today at the Toronto Stock Exchange is worth millions of dollars. Company annual sales are 500 million dollars. Over 2,000 employees work in 15 modern plants on three continents. Five in Canada (four in Quebec and one in Ontario), other plants are in the U.S.A., England, France, Portugal, Germany, China, Taiwan, South Korea and India. Even though most of businesses are trying to outsource their work to less expensive countries, Velan Inc. maintains half of their employees in Canada while significantly contributing to the economic growth of Canada and Quebec.

Mr. Velan’s valves are used in oil refineries, gas, petrochemical industry, on ships, nuclear submarines, nuclear and coal power plants, in aviation industry as well as in satellites, the space station and even in the largest physics laboratory in the world - the largest particle accelerator CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research) in Geneva. Velan Inc. is the largest producer of valves in the world and their market includes more than 50 countries.

Mr. Velan is after a “Czech” prince Rupert, founder of the Hudson Bay Company, and the famous Mr. Bata, another Czech businessman who made it big. His business is so unique that it even became part of the studies at Canadian universities, namely at the HEC (l’École des hautes études commerciales) in Montreal.

The success of the company is demonstrated by its continuously increasing prosperity and numerous awards bestowed on it. In addition to those already noted, these are also worth mentioning: Canada Export Award 1991, Best Quebec Businessman 1996, in 1998 Velan Inc. was nominated as one of the best fifteen companies of the century, it received the “Pioneer in Nuclear Technology” award in Holland in 2004, HEC university awarded the company New Vision Award in 1992 and another award was given by the Concordia University in 1995, in 2002 Velan Inc. was nominated into the Hall of Fame of the valve industry, Valve World Fellow, Telus gave Mr. Velan the Grand Prix Humaniste award in 2004, Company of the Year by Les Affaires business journal... and Mr. Velan is also listed in the “Who is Who in Canadian Business”. Also for his support of workers Mr. Velan was given, as the only industrialist in history, honorary membership in the Confédération des syndicats nationaux by the national union federation, the CSN.

Mr. Velan is ready to share his success – he supports grand humanitarian and cultural projects exactly along Einstein’s idea that “Any success in the world is worthless if not shared with others” which is a motto of his more than fifty-year-long charitable activity in the Rotary Club. For years Mr. Velan was its president and director of charitable fund for which he was given Montreal Club’s Centennial Award on the occasion of club’s 100 years anniversary. Moreover, Mr. Velan established his own Velan Foundation. Since 1981 he gives every year the “Velan Award” to Canadians who were successful in humanitarian projects abroad. In 1989 the Velans were instrumental in the first positive impact of the Goodwill Committee—The Olga Havel Foundation. In 1991 they organized Olga Havel’s visit to Canada and over the time they sent more than half a million of dollars to charitable and humanitarian projects (for example Charity Blansko, Brno Children Hospital, study visits of Czech doctors in the U.S.A. and Canada, Olympic Games of Mentally

Handicapped, assistance during the floods etc.) in the Czech Republic.

Canadian media agree that Mr. Velan is one of the biggest philanthropists in Montreal and Canada. They base their claim on facts such as foundation of a shelter for homeless women and children: for La Rue Des Femmes/Herstreet Foundation – the Velans bought in 2002 a building in Montreal named after Mrs. Olga – whose honorary president is Mr. Velan. Camp Papillon, Pavilion for Quebec organization of handicapped children, is also financed by the same benefactors who have been supporting the children's summer camp Hostýn practically since its beginning in 1954.

In India, where the Velans “chipped in” to build a hospital, their name is also well known. The spirit of Mr. Velan - astronomer, played its role in the creation of the Cosmolab Velan in Mont-Mégantic and astronomy pavilion in Mont Tremblant. Velan's name is also known among the Mohawks who named Mr. Velan honorary chief of their Oka reservation where he contributed to the purchase of school equipment, cultural center and radio station that in addition to broadcasting in their native language also broadcasts in English and French.

Mr. Velan cooperates on the project “On Own Feet – Centipede” with Běla Gran Jensen, a Norwegian of Czech decent who was named the greatest Czech abroad in 2012. Every year a million of Czech children make Christmas cards and send them to Mrs. Jensen in Norway. She sells them (with the backing of Mr. Velan) and the proceeds are used for humanitarian purposes. Mr. Velan has donated through this project hundreds of thousands more to children hospital in Kostelec nad Černými lesy.

In 1998 the Czech Republic gave the Gratias Agit Award to the Velans for the promotion of the good name of the Czech Republic abroad. The Czech and Slovak Association in Canada awarded them in 1999 honorary Masaryk Award for their activities. Mr. Velan as the only Czech living abroad also received the annual Award of Ethics Forum in Prague in 2005.

The Velans have kept their hearts opened all their lives. Over the years they have donated millions of dollars to a multitude of charitable projects. They also instilled philanthropy in their sons and so did they in their

children. Continuing this tradition makes the Velans proud. Deservedly so.

As successful as Karel Velan is in the world of business, he is equally successful in his hobbies he devoted over seventy years of his life to. He is an internationally recognized expert in astrophysics and Universe research. Because of his revolutionary theory of the “Big Bang” the Oxford University organized a scientific conference.

How did he actually get this idea? One day while vacationing in Florida in 1985 after watching the movie the “Day after” Mr. Velan became inspired and formulated a revolutionary theory of multi-universe creation. His book “The Multi-Universe Cosmos” was published in 1992. Eight years later he published another book “The Birth and History of the Cosmos” which was also published in French and Chinese.

It would not be Mr. Velan if he would not show his philanthropy even in this field. He established the Cosmolab Velan in the national park Mont Mégantic – an observatory and museum of cosmology, every year visited by more than two thousand students. He did the same thing in 2005 in Domaine St. Bernard – Mont Tremblant with his “Velan Astronomy Pavilion”, he bought a telescope for this pavilion as well as for the observatory of a university in Leicester, England – a place of one of his plants.

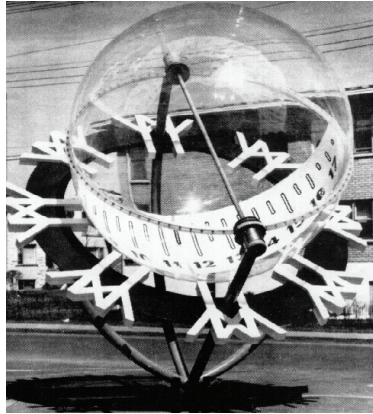
Mr. Velan expressed his love of the universe and planets in a creation of a sundial – he is a member of the CCSQ – association of Quebec “sundialists”. For Expo '67 he designed and donated to Montreal the largest sundial in Quebec. It was placed in a plexiglass sphere measuring 4.25 m diameter which was installed in front of the Hélène de Champlain restaurant on Ile Ste-Hélène. Unfortunately someone stole the decorative clock-face measuring 5.5 m in diameter. All that is left is a photograph (it can be found under number 112-MTRL-028 at the internet address [http://cadrans-solaires.scg.ulaval.ca/v08-08-04/catalogue/catalogue\\_111.html](http://cadrans-solaires.scg.ulaval.ca/v08-08-04/catalogue/catalogue_111.html)).

Another hobby of Mr. Velan is music. That is why he supports concerts of Czech artists and ensembles in Canada. In 1991, on the occasion of Antonín Dvořák's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, together with Josef Suk and Alain Nona he established Antonín

Dvořák Foundation in Montreal.

In 2003 cooperation with a Wisconsin university began. This foundation organizes competitions for young Canadian, American, Czech and Slovak interpreters of Czech and Slovak classical masters and reciprocal internships of the winners in North America, Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Mr. Velan was also involved in establishing the Czech-Canadian Chamber of Commerce. He became its president. Together with Thomas Bata and Petr Pithart, president of Czech Senate, Mr. Velan was also a co-founder and president of a Czech-North American Chamber of Commerce which was founded later in 1998 in Boston on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the creation of Czechoslovakia. The chamber of commerce is now called CNACC&C – Czech-North American Chamber of Commerce and Culture Inc. It is registered in the U.S.A. and has an office in Toronto (<http://www.czechevents.net/>). Its president and main sponsor is again Karel Velan.



*The largest sundial in Montreal,  
Quebec a gift from Velan*

In addition to promoting business contacts between American, Canadian and Czech businesses its other goal is to help increase the number of top Czech classical music interpreters and artists performing in North America.

I wanted to pay homage to our honorees and although I know Mrs. Olga Velan all my life from our Montreal Czech and Slovak Association in Canada committee and the bazaars (and Mr. Karel Velan from occasional encounters), I have gathered the information about their life from the sources available on the internet. I apologize in advance for any discrepancies.

We wish Mrs. Olga and Mr. Karel Velan good health, a lot of joy with their large family and everlasting energy for future activities. I am honored to live in proximity of such special couple whose high-spirited life was based on life philosophy which Mr. Velan briefly summarized as: “I have always enjoyed giving more than being on the receiving end”.

THE END